

## Unmasking Ho Chi Minh, a criminal

*Note: This is the English version of the summary from "Unmasking Ho Chi Minh" in Vietnamese by Huy Phong and Yen Anh, edited in the United States of America in 1989.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Some American reporters used to call him a nationalist leader or the George Washington of Vietnam and described him holding a U.S. Constitution in his hand when talking to them. They soon spread over America the image of a prodigious man, playing a historic role in that part of the world. In Vietnam, his communist underlings surrounded him with a cult bordering on idolatry. Everything about him from his utterances and writings to his clothing and sandals were treasured as sacred relics. But the immense majority of Viet people have been and are heaping curses and abuses upon him. Their deep-seated despise, indignation and rancor have spawned a rich body of popular literature made of witty phrases, rhymed sayings, couplets and short poems, using the subtleties and peculiarities of their language as a political weapons. This body of literature is now part of the Viet language and will remain forever with the Viet nation.

So how deeply offended the Viet people must have felt when they heard that UNESCO was planning to honor the man. Yes, UNESCO, the United Nations (UN) main engine of propaganda is attempting to internationalize and perpetuate the cult of this man. Such a move should surprise no one, in view of the true nature of the UN has any interest in knowing what it is doing, the Viet people are determined to bring out the truth about UNESCO's hero.

But in the search for truth, one is first confronted with what Winston Churchill would call a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. You cannot even call him by name without falling victim of his dupery. He posed as Ho Chi Minh and as Nguyen Ai Quoc, but he was neither of these persons. So it is no small task to unearth the historical records, bring the facts to light and expose to the real man.

But the first step in the process has been done and the results presented in a new book in Viet language, entitled "Unmasking Ho Chi Minh" by Huy Phong and Yen

Anh. The authors, one in France and the other in the United States, have ready access to some of the largest libraries and archives in the world. They intend to follow this pioneering effort with more research and more publications. But their first book should be sufficient to give world opinion a shock about a heretofore unsuspected hoax.

### **A THOROUGH VARNISHING JOB**

Since the name Ho Chi Minh began to attract world attention, many books and articles both in Vietnam and abroad have been written about the man. Unfortunately, little or no valid information can be found in these works since they draw their materials almost exclusively from a crop of publications which appeared roughly between 1972 and 1985 and were authored by officials and agencies of the Hanoi regime or by individuals interested in currying favor with that regime. Among works of this type are:

- 1- Hong Ha (Red River) 1, Uncle Ho in His Youth, Thanh Nien Publishing, Hanoi, 1976.
- 2- Hong Ha (Red River) 2, Uncle Ho in Lenin's Country, Thanh Nien Publishing, Hanoi, 1980.
- 3- Su That (The Truth) Publ. 1, President Ho and the October Revolution, by Ho Chi Minh Museum, Saigon, 1985.
- 4- Su That (The Truth) Publ. 2, Selected Topics on Ho Chi Minh, Hanoi, 1960.
- 5- Su That (The Truth) Publ. 3, Complete Collection on Ho Chi Minh, Hanoi, 1981.
- 6- Su That (The Truth) Publ. 4, Revolutionary Poetry (1930-1945), Hanoi, 1980.
- 7- Le Duan, Under the Glorious Flag of the Party, Su That (The Truth) Publication., Hanoi, 1972.  
(Le Duan : Late general-secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam from 1967-1986).
- 8- Trung Dai Hoc (Highschool-University) Publ., History of the Workers' Party of Vietnam, Hanoi, 1974.
- 9- Phu Nu (Women) Publ., A Rose for Uncle, Hanoi, 1985.
- 10- E. Kabelev, Comrade Ho Chi Minh, Thanh Nien (The Youth) Publ., 1985.

The hack writers of this literature always refer to Ho Chi Minh as Bac (Uncle), a term heavy with affection and respect, or as Nguoi (He), a very reverential pronoun form, especially when written with a capital N (Nguoi). Ho is portrayed as a man of proletarian birth, with a consuming love for his country and compatriots, with legendary intelligence, courage and determination, or as a young man braving all

obstacles and roaming the world in search for a way to liberate his country, as the greatest of all revolutionaries of Vietnam, as the first Viet person to discover the merit of Marxism, as a co-founder of the French Communist Party and so on. That was how a veritable cult of the living Ho rapidly developed and obfuscated the traditional veneration accorded national heroes after their death.

Virtually all the basic data for these publications can be traced directly or indirectly to a book entitled "Stories of President Ho's Active Life" by Tran Dan Tien, first published in 1948 by Van Hoc Publishing. It was apparently intended as a biography but was presented in the form of an interview with Ho chi Minh. In the introduction, Tran Dan Tien comments : *"Many Viet and foreign writers and journalists have tried to write biographies of the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, but so far they have had little success."* The reason is simple : *"The modest President Ho doesn't like to be talked about too much. Later on in the book, when the question of biography is mentioned, Ho replies : "Biography, that is a good thing. But at present our people still live in poverty. After eighty years of slavery, our country is in ruin and we have a big task of reconstruction. Let's do what is most urgent first. As for my biography, it can wait"*.

(It was untrue. Few years after 1954, North Vietnam built socialism hurriedly. 1954-1957 showed some progress in economy but after, the year of 1957, that Ho and his cohorts decided to open war to the South. It means Ho wanted to build up North Vietnam in a hurry to make it as "the rear of socialism" and the South would be "the front of socialism").

One could imagine that the interviewer Tran Dan Tien was disappointed to find Ho too preoccupied with rebuilding the country to give any thought to his biography. But who is Tran Dan Tien ? It turns out that Tran Dan Tien was none other than Ho himself. That's right. The same Ho chi Minh asked questions and answered them. In 1985, Ha Minh Duc, a teacher and fervent Ho admirer, wrote a book entitled "Literary Works of President Ho Chi Minh" which was prefaced by Professor Nguyen Khanh Toan, another high ranking educator, and published by Khoa Hoc (Social Study), Hanoi. In it, the author negligently reveals that Tran Dan Tien is but a pen name of Ho Chi Minh. On pp. 132-133, Ha Minh Duc remarks: *"Responding to the wishes of his people and of friends throughout the world, President Ho, under the pen name Tran Dan Tien, wrote the book "Stories of President Ho's Active Life" . . . With its vivid and illustrative anecdotes of his past activities and its sound political, social and historical value, his work is an autobiography worthy of a national hero and president of the country"*.

Ha Minh Duc seemed to take Ho's method of fictitious dialogue as merely a convenient literary device without understanding Ho's real intention and, because

of his naivete, unwittingly exposed his hero's deceitfulness. Ho set out to write his autobiography, but with the idea of making the readers believe that the work was not his, that, as he said it at least twice in the book, he felt he should rebuild the country first, before talking about himself. But that is not his only lie. Practically everything in his book is a lie, a falsehood or a false insinuation. And this with the full knowledge that his book would become the Bible and the stock in trade for a host of scribes eager to write about him. Indeed they quickly put their imagination to work and embroidered the innumerable yarns of his book into a rich mythology around him even before his death.

### **HIS PERSONAL DATA AND BACKGROUND**

What personal data? We don't even know his year of birth with any certainty. As many as five years are found in the literature. He himself gave two of them: 1892 in his application to the French Colonial School and 1890 in his book under the pseudonym Tran Dan Tien. The Service of Control and Assistance to Natives of French Colonies (Archives Nationales de France) recorded the year 1894, which probably came from Ho himself. His passport taken for his first trip to Russia (1923) showed 1895. Yen Son, an agent of the Viet Communist Party, claimed the year 1891 in an article entitled "Nguyen Ai Quoc, the Brilliant Champion of the Revolution" in the Thong Tin (Information) Newspaper, Aug. 30 1945, Hanoi. According to the list of candidates in the 1946 election (the first after he took control), his place of birth was in the province of Ha Tinh. Only years later did people find out that his real place of birth was the village Kim Lien, district of Nam Dan, province of Nghe An.

Among his many names, two are most widely known. These are Ho Chi Minh (Ho Who Enlightened) and Nguyen Ai Quoc (Nguyen the Patriot). But, as will be shown later, they were not his. He appropriated them from other persons for political purposes. Here we prefer to call him only by his real name, which is Nguyen Tat Thanh, even after he has become Ho Chi Minh or Nguyen Ai Quoc. His father, Nguyen Sinh Huy, attained the academic rank of "pho bang" (subdoctoral) and for some time was a small mandarin. Thanh was the youngest of the three children. His brother Nguyen Tat Dat (or Ca Khiem) did not achieve any academic success and made a living as a geomancer and Oriental physician. His sister Bach Lien or Thanh was unmarried and considered herself as a failure.

Nguyen Tat Thanh was educated at a French-Viet school and after getting a certificate of basic study in 1905 went to teach at the elementary school Duc Thanh in Phan Thiet province. In 1911, he went to France on board the Admiral

Latouche-Tre'ville, earning the travel expenses by working, probably as a waiter or kitchen aid, for the Compagnie des Chargeurs Re'unis, which operated the ship.

### **HIS FIRST MOVE IN FRANCE**

The first thing he did after reaching Marseille was applying for admission to the Colonial School. On Sept. 15, 1911 he wrote a letter to the Minister of Colonies and the President of France. Translated, it reads as follows (a dash indicates paragraph):

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*Dear Mr. Minister,*

*I have the honor of soliciting of your kindness the favor of being admitted to the courses at the Colonial School as a boarder. - I am currently employed by the Chargeurs Re'unis l'Admiral Latouche-Tre'ville for a living. - I am altogether without resource and eager to get an education. I would like to become useful to France in her care for my compatriots and at the same time be able to afford them the benefits of education. - I am native of the province of Nghe an in Annam. - I hope for a favorable answer from you. Meanwhile please accept, Mr. Minister, the anticipated assurance of my gratitude.*

*Nguyen Tat Thanh, born 1892 at Vinh, son of Mr. Nguyen Sinh Huy (subdoctor in literature); - student: French, Vietnamese, Chinese characters."*

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The letter concludes with some cliches improperly joined together, making the construct grammatically incorrect (in the French version). But this in no way prevents the letter as a whole from reflecting Thanh's sincerity and eagerness in seeking admission to the Colonial School. It strongly suggests that Thanh went to France not with the idea of revolution in mind, but of seeking a career as a well-paid functionary of the France administrative system in Vietnam. This explains why Thanh did not take advantage of the "Dong Du" program, which was organized by Phan Boi Chau and operated throughout the country to recruit young men with revolutionary minds and long-standing anti-French mentality in the family and send them to Japan and China for training. What is more, his father, brother and sister all disliked Phan boi Chau and his revolutionary work (Dang Thai Mai, *Memoirs*, Hanoi, 1985, pp. 234-238).

The view that Thanh, in applying for the Colonial School was seeking a career of service to the French, is further strengthened by the fact that the application was

never mentioned by Nguyen Tat Thanh and the many communists who wrote about him. In fact the two letters of application were unknown to the public until they were discovered in 1983 in the French Archives Nationales, Section d'Outre-Mer, Ecole Coloniale, by a Viet researcher. For Viet communists, this was nothing short of a bolt from the blue. Those friendly to Hanoi, like the French writer D. Hemery, tried very hard to play down the significance of those letters. Some desperately attempted to defend Nguyen Tat Thanh by saying that Thanh only adopted Phan Chu Trinh's approach, that is to cooperate with the French in order to get them to improve their colonial policies. True, Phan Chu Trinh did consider such an approach for a short time when the French governor of Indochina was evidently open to liberal ideas, but when he was replaced by a colonialist type of person, Phan Chu Trinh quickly changed his attitude toward the French. Furthermore, if Thanh had the praiseworthy intention of seeking the interests of the country through friendly cooperation with the French, then he would never have forgotten to mention his plan and elaborate on it in his book.

### **DID HE LIVE IN LONDON ?**

We know that Nguyen Tat Thanh was not admitted to the Colonial School. That was in 1911. We also know that toward the end of 1919, he had a permanent address in Paris. Over the intervening 8 years, there is no firm evidence of his whereabouts.

According to his book and to Hong Ha who rehashed it several pages at a time, Nguyen Tat Thanh went to London to learn English, first took odd jobs, then was employed at the famous Carlton Hotel as a dishwasher; then the French chef promoted him to a cake maker. These bits of information are interspersed among numerous stories illustrating Thanh's patriotism, revolutionary zeal, concern for the poor and endurance with hardships. Hong Ha also tells of Thanh's other revolutionary activities : "Nguyen Tat Thanh joined foreign labor unions and recruited many Viet patriots in England. Together with English workers he staged demonstrations on the banks of Thames, demanding freedom, democracy and workers' rights. With the might of a waterfall, the urge of his zeal thrust him forward over all difficulties, hardships and privations". (Hong Ha 1, p. 34).

During this period, French security was informed by a Viet person that Phan chu Trinh (Viet patriot then living in France under surveillance) might be corresponding with a certain Nguyen Tat Thanh in London. Information on the latter was requested from the Bureau of Intelligence in London which after extensive effort failed to locate Nguyen Tat Thanh.

Records at the Foreign Office in London show the following : On June 23 1925 the London Foreign Office received through the French Embassy a message from the French Foreign Ministry asking for help in tracing the two Viet persons Thanh and Tat Thanh who it thought might be living in London. It gave one address for each man, that for Tat Thanh being 8 Stephen Street, Tottenham, London. British Security went to work and easily found Thanh or Joseph Thanh, a student. They kept him under surveillance for years and finally removed him from the list of suspects. As for Tat Thanh years of investigation turned up nothing (Public Record Office, Foreign Office, Fo 372/668.83562 and Fo 372/668.129462, SLOTFOM IX/I0). All the above information came from a study by Nguyen The Anh who published his results in Duong Moi Magazine, No. 7 1984, Paris, under the title *"What to Think about Ho Chi Minh's Life of Poverty? "*

Also according to Nguyen The Anh, Mr. Denis Duncanson, English expert on the Viet Communist Party, wrote a book entitled "Government and Revolution in Vietnam", in which he stated that stories about Ho Chi Minh's living in England, making a living as apprentice baker and occasionally visiting meeting places of the Fabian Society were all deliberate fabrications.

So all evidence strongly suggests that Nguyen Tat Thanh, after being refused admission to the Colonial School, continued to work for the Chargeurs Reunis, going from port to port and came to England occasionally but did not live there. This is in spite of the fact that in his book he could mention some accurate details about life in London. For he could easily pick up that much information from daily conversation with Phan Van Truong.

### **DID HE WRITE TO PHAN CHU TRINH ?**

Phan Chu Trinh was one of the most famous Viet patriots. Returning to Vietnam after extensive travels in Japan and China, he was arrested, received a heavy sentence but was later released and allowed to live in Paris under surveillance. It would be a great asset for an aspirant leader if the public can be convinced that he has been familiar with the few people who plan great things for the nation.

Thanh's autobiography claimed that he met Phan Chu Trinh in Paris after leaving London. Based on this, Hong Ha supplied detailed information on several missives sent from London by Nguyen Tat Thanh to Phan Chu Trinh. Later on, a government publication called "Complete Collection of Viet Literature" listed 4 of them, 2 letters and a postcard allegedly in 1913 and 1 letter allegedly in 1914. As printed in the book only one letter was dated (1913) but with a footnote saying the date 1913 was derived from other information contained in Thanh's book (Tran

Dan Tien). Return address was shown on only one of the 1913 letters as 10 Orchard Place, 10 Southampton Place, England, and on the 1914 letter as 8 Stephen Street, Tottenham, London. This second address was the one given by the French Foreign Ministry to the British Security in 1925 for investigation on Thanh. This seems to suggest that French security got the return address either by intercepting the letter or through an informer after Phan Chu Trinh received it; further the true date might be more recent than 1914.

While the three letters as printed in the book were typeset, a photocopy of the postcard was shown, with a view of Dakar (French colony), English stamp and English postmark. Of course Thanh didn't have to live in England to mail a postcard there. If he was a sailor on a French merchant ship stopping off at many ports, he could buy and mail a postcard while in London or he could buy a postcard in Dakar and bring it to London to mail.

In all the letters Thanh earnestly asked for a reply : "Please write to me", or "Please answer soon", or "Hoping to hear from you soon". Yet in their writings Thanh and his fawning writers could not produce a single photocopied reply from Phan Chu Trinh.

Thus all indications are that Thanh was not interested in getting answers from Phan Chu Trinh but only in creating the myth that he corresponded with the great patriot.

### **WAS HE THE REAL NGUYEN AI QUOC ?**

The earliest date when the name Nguyen Ai Quoc was attached to the individual Nguyen Tat Thanh was in January 1920 and this occurred in a security report by the Viet agent Tran Quang Ham (Tran Quang Ham), nicknamed Jean (Archives Nationales, SLOTFOM, I 6 , Jan 6 1920). Jean wrote that he had been investigating Nguyen Ai Quoc since Dec. 1, 1919; that he lived at 6 Villa des Gobelins; that he had been in America and England before coming to France, four years ago; that he could read and write English and French proficiently and had some reading and speaking skill in Italian and Spanish; that he was not receiving financial support from any secret organization; that he wrote extensively in French newspapers, recommending reforms in colonial policies.

One point of the report is blatantly false, namely that the man could write competently in French. This contradicts Thanh himself when he wrote in his book in connection with the 8-point demand for colonial policy reform submitted to the Versailles Conference (1919) : "The idea was proposed by Mr. Nguyen Tat Thanh, but the write-up was done by lawyer Phan Van Truong, since at that time Mr. Nguyen Tat Thanh could not write in French yet" (Tran Dan Tien, p. 29). Thanh's admission was echoed by Hong Ha in Hong Ha 1, p. 49 : "While working in

photographic developing for a living young Nguyen assiduously learned more French from Mr. Phan Van Truong".

The lie about Nguyen Ai Quoc's capability in French indicates that the entire report by Jean cannot be taken at face value, or even that Jean reported nothing but what Nguyen Tat Thanh wanted him to report. This latter possibility is in line with Jean's admission elsewhere that the information in his report was drawn from a conversation with Nguyen Ai Quoc when the two were visiting the Salon Ae'ronautique (and not from his separate investigation using other sources).

Thanh wanted it on record that he was Nguyen Ai Quoc, that he traveled and wrote extensively. For the present, the record was in some dark corner, other Viet people only knew him as Nguyen Tat Thanh. But later on, he intended to claim credit for what was done under that name.

Researchers in Paris have recently unearthed many newspaper articles, signed Nguyen Ai Quoc and written before 1919, that is before Thanh arrived or when he was a newcomer trying to learn French from Phan Van Truong. Records show that Nguyen Ai Quoc was the pseudonym of Phan Van Truong, the man who housed Nguyen Tat Thanh and lived at 6 Villa des Gobelins, which was the address correctly declared by Thanh in Jean's report. This was also borne out in Hong Ha's writings: "As soon as he arrived in Paris, Nguyen Ai Quoc came to live at 6 Villa des Gobelins... That was the home of lawyer Phan Van Truong" (Hong Ha 1, pp. 47-48). Hong Ha might as well say : "Nguyen Ai Quoc came to live in the home of Nguyen Ai Quoc". For even security agents referred to Phan Van Truong as Nguyen Ai Quoc. This was due to the fact that newspaper articles and leaflets by Phan Van Truong had always been underwritten thus : On behalf of the group of Viet patriots : Nguyen Ai Quoc. This was Phan Van Truong's group. It consisted of Phan Van Truong, Phan Chu Trinh and Nguyen The Truyen. Only later did it add Nguyen An Ninh and Nguyen Tat Thanh. On January 30, 1920, security agent reported on the propaganda activities of the Viets in France and added : "Nguyen Ai Quoc is the man who composes leaflets and documents such as the 8-point demand of the Viet people... He acts as the general secretary of the "Group of Viet Patriots" and secretary of the "Group of Viet Revolutionaries" (Archives Nationales, SLOTFOM 1119). By Nguyen Ai Quoc, the reporter clearly meant Phan Van Truong, since by his own admission Nguyen Tat Thanh was not yet capable of that kind of writing and since it was widely known in security circles that Phan Van Truong was "the soul of all activities at 6 Villa des Gobelins".

**SWIPING OTHERS' WORKS**

In Paris, Nguyen Tat Thanh tricked one friendly agent into identifying him by the name Nguyen Ai Quoc. Thirty years later, in Hanoi, he took credit for things done in Paris under that name and wrote in his book : "Mr. Nguyen Ai Quoc (himself) organized the patriotic Viet people in Paris and in the provinces and led the group in introducing the 8-point demand at the 1919 Conference of Versailles" (p. 29).

In 1925, a document called "Proceedings Against French Colonization" was published in Paris by Librairie du Travail (Quai de Jemmapes, 96 Paris). Prefaced by Nguyen The Truyen, one of the 3 members of the group, it included 3 volumes, the first by Nguyen Ai Quoc, the second by Nguyen The Truyen and the third by Nguyen Ai Quoc. Later, the Hanoi regime republished the work without Nguyen The Truyen's preface and without his second volume, giving the impression that the entire work was by Nguyen Ai Quoc. This done, Thanh and his hack writers were ready to claim that he was the sole author of the Proceedings, because they had induced the public to believe that Nguyen Ai Quoc was Nguyen Tat Thanh : "The Proceedings against French Colonization by Comrade Nguyen Ai Quoc was published in France in 1925. It dealt with the hardships of the people of Vietnam and other nations under the barbarous rule of French colonialists" (Su That Publ. 2, p. 100).

But Nguyen Ai Quoc, the author of the first and third volumes was Phan Van Truong, not Nguyen Tat Thanh, because in Paris Phan Van Truong used that name publicly and extensively and it is unthinkable that he knowingly transferred that name to Nguyen Tat Thanh, the lowest ranking member of his group of five.

Removing Nguyen The Truyen from the Proceedings facilitated Thanh's claim and represented the first step in deposing the man. The second step was carried out by Dang Xuan Thieu, one of Thanh's underlings. Thieu's hatchet job came in the form of a cheap satirical poem portraying Nguyen The Truyen as a playboy, a womanizer, an empty-talk revolutionary accommodating to French colonialism and brushing aside the cause of the country.

The character assassination was connived at, perhaps urged on, by Thanh whom the victim had offered much assistance and a model of true leadership. Nguyen The Truyen joined the two Phan brothers to fight for reforms in the French colonial policies and promote the interests of Vietnam. He was a member of the French Communist Party but withdrew in 1927 when it became clear that communism was unacceptable. Thanh stayed with the party but continued to get help from Nguyen The Truyen, not only for himself but for his friends who needed a period of training in Paris before going to Moscow.

Nguyen The Truyen was the founder and editor of two papers : one in French, called "Le Pariah" (the pariah), the other in Viet language, called "Viet Nam Hon" (the soul of Vietnam). Thanh admitted that somewhat implicitly in a 1926 report that he sent from China to his bosses in Moscow (see below). Dang Xuan Thieu who wrote a poem to smear Nguyen The Truyen, added the following footnote to his work : "Viet Nam Hon - the first 3 words of the 15th verse - is the name of the nationalist party's paper founded by Nguyen The Truyen". But all this did not prevent other Thanh adulators from appropriating the credit for their master. Thus Hong Ha wrote : "Thinking of his compatriots and realizing that awareness would require propaganda and education, Nguyen Tat Thanh decided to create a vehicle in Viet language with the name Viet Nam Hon" (Hong Ha 1, p. 189).

Grabbing the name Nguyen Ai Quoc allowed Thanh to take credit for anything done under that name: organization, demonstrations, 8-point demand, proceedings against French colonial policies, publications. But Phan Van Truong always used his pseudonym Nguyen Ai Quoc as a representative of his group. This led many Viets living in Paris at the time to regard the name Nguyen Ai Quoc as the name of the group itself. To ensure success, it was necessary therefore for Thanh and his men to discredit not only Nguyen The Truyen but the other two leaders as well, namely Phan Chu Trinh and Phan Van Truong.

In his book Nguyen Tat Thanh wrote : *"It should be noted here that Phan Chu Trinh and Phan Van Truong were not in favor of the activities of the group of patriotic Viets"* (p. 29). Then Hong Ha spun this yarn : "Phan Chu Trinh disliked training and study. He enjoyed billiard games at Ludeau, 14 rue de Sorbonne... Phan Van Truong stayed away from people's activities, was fickle, timorous and tried to avoid entanglements". Having said that, Hong Ha immediately fabricated a French report which says : *"There are signs that Phan Chu Trinh's thinking is far different from that of Nguyen Ai Quoc... The latter has emerged as a leader with much prestige among the Viet people in France, while the reputation of Phan Chu Trinh and Phan Van Truong wanes"*(Hong Ha 1, pp. 51-52).

### **WHO WAS THE FIRST VIET RED?**

Communist writers serving the Hanoi regime portray Nguyen Tat Thanh as "the first Viet communist", the only Viet who participated in the founding of the French Communist Party (Hong Ha 2, pp. 107, 111), as "the man who was able to escape the narrow patriotism of contemporary intellectuals and revolutionaries to promptly embrace Marxism-Leninism" (Le Duan, p. 9-10). Is this description

correct ? It is necessary to break this question into 3 separate ones and answer them successively.

*Was Nguyen Tat Thanh the first Viet to become aware of the Marxist theory or come into contact with Marxism-Leninism?*

Definitely no. Phan Boi Chau was one of the first Viets to be acquainted with the Marxist theory and definitely the first to have personal experience with the Soviet regime. He was in Japan in 1905 when Chinese intellectuals of the New Literature movement frequently came to observe Japanese reforms. These people were familiar with and interested in Marxism through the work of Kang You Wei, Liang Qui Chao and Sun Yat Sen. It is most unlikely that Phan Boi Chau did not inquire from them about Marxism since he was expressly in search for new ideas that might be of value in Vietnam's liberation.

In addition, according to French scholar Georges Boudard (Phan Boi Chau et la societe Vietnamienne, France-Asie, No. 199, Paris, p. 375), at the suggestion of Nguyen Thuong Hien, in 1918, Phan Boi Chau began to read the works of Liang Qui Chao, thus getting a more direct knowledge of Marxism. A fragment of what might be called Phan Boi Chau memoirs can be found in "Phan Boi Chau Annals", edited by late Nguyen Khac Ngu and published by the Historical and Geographical Group, Saigon 1973 (pp. 196-198). The following is based on Phan Boi Chau's own words written in the first person.

In Feb. 1920, a delegation of the Russian Communist Party came to China for a meeting at the Peking University. Phan Boi Chau wanted to meet these people and learn more about communism. Looking for a way of getting introduced to them, he translated into Chinese a book on the Soviet government and policies by a Japanese author, brought his translation along to Peking and showed it to the Chinese coordinator of the meeting. Seeing that Phan Boi Chau was an earnest student of communism, this person introduced him to two Russians, the head of the Russian delegation and another with the sinicized name Lap. That was the first time Phan Boi Chau was in personal contact with Russians. At one point he said : *"Some Viet people like to study in your country; please tell us how to go about it". Lap gave directions for traveling by train through Siberia or by boat and estimated the time it would take to reach Moscow, then added that before the trip the student must accept the communist creed and commit himself to propaganda work and socialist revolution after his return, that if those requirements are met, all expenses will be borne by his government. Finally Lap said to Phan Boi Chau: "It is through you that we first come to know about the Viet people".*

Thus Phan Boi Chau was the first Viet to come into direct contact with Soviet officials. This happened in Feb. 1920, almost one year before Nguyen Tat Thanh joined the French Communist Party at the Tours Congress. As stated in "Phan Boi Chau Annals", Phan Boi Chau saw through the communist designs and never responded to the Russians' offer to finance Viet students.

*\* Was Nguyen Tat Thanh the first to join a communist party or serve in the world communist movement?*

No. Many Viet persons turned communist before he did. Dang Thuc Hua (Dang Thuc Hua) became member of the Chinese Communist Party before 1919. At that time many people in the anti-French movement went to China or Japan for study, so they could better serve the country. Of these some became communists or fellow travelers. In France, Nguyen The Truyen joined the French Communist Party in 1920 at the same time as Nguyen Tat Thanh, only to reject communism in 1927.

But all these people only considered communism as a means to their patriotic end. Their mistake is understandable when we consider the fact that their first hand information on communism and direct experience with it were very limited, while driven by patriotism they were looking hard for a road to national independence.

*\* Was Nguyen Tat Thanh the first to embrace communism, not for what it could do for Vietnam but only for what it could do for himself?*

Yes. Nguyen Tat Thanh never swerved from the communist road, even though circumstances were favorable for such a decision. He had the example of Phan Boi Chau who rejected communism outright and that of Nguyen The Truyen, a close associate, who quit after trying communism for 7 years. Thanh must have known other Viets who were sympathetic to communism but began to doubt about it. He spent a good deal of time training in Moscow between 1921 to 1935. That was a good time for observing communism. The great purges had started which eventually liquidated millions of Russians. The Russian economy had collapsed, forcing the adoption of the New Economic Policy. The first five year plan was failing. Any person who stayed in Russia for a couple of years around that time could hardly be ignorant of the bloody annexation by Russia of a multitude of big and small independent states at various times between 1920 and 1925, and could hardly miss reading some of Lenin's writing, for example: "*Soviet power gives world dictatorship of the proletariat priority over any national sacrifices, however hard they may be*", or "*As long as we have not conquered the whole world, we must know how to take advantage of the antagonisms and contradictions among the imperialists*".

Yet, Nguyen Tat Thanh never changed his mind about communism. Instead, he went on to liquidate revolutionary leaders and their parties, seized power, expropriated and killed petty landowners and turned his country into a client state of the Soviets. If he served communism well, communism would serve him well. He got power, fame and apotheosis.

### **WHAT HE SAID HE DID IN CHINA**

Included in "Su That Publ." (The Truth Publ.) is a report dated June 3, 1926 and signed Nguyen Ai Quoc, that Thanh sent from Canton, China, to his superior in Moscow c/o the Soviet Consul in Canton. Along with other activities that are now difficult to verify, Thanh reported the following accomplishments: organizing the "United Peasants" for Viet people in Thailand; organizing a propaganda school in Canton where students came from Vietnam to train for one month and a half, the first session gathering 10 students, the second to open in July for about 30.

What he called United Peasants grew out of an anti-French movement (Viet population in Thailand was considerable since Vietnam became a French colony) which was already strong in 1910. That anti-French movement was the work of Phan boi Chau who came there in person, and of his many disciples, including Dang Thuc Hua (Dang Thuc Hua). An early follower of Phan Boi Chau, Hua first went to Tokyo as a student, supported the great leader's lines of action and participated in the founding of the Vietnam Restoration Society. In 1908 when the Viet students were expelled from Japan, he was sent to Thailand to open a training school and lead the revolutionary movement there. But he had to leave Thailand in 1916, because under a new French-Thai agreement he was vulnerable to French suppressive measures. He moved the school to China and stayed there for 3 years. During this period he succumbed to communist influence and became a member of the Chinese Communist Party. He returned to Thailand as a communist agent in 1919 and organized the United Peasants, that Thanh mentioned in his report as his own accomplishment, although that year he was still a newcomer at Phan Van Truong's house in Paris.

As for the propaganda school Thanh said he organized, it was not he who organized it. It was a school of the Chinese Communist Party with one section for Viet students. Some Viet people who attended the second session are currently still living. They provided the following information: In the section for Viet students Thanh was the only Viet lecturer, all others were Chinese, including Peng Pai (Banh Bai, executed in China in 1927) in agitation techniques among peasants and Liu Shaoqui Ky (Luu Thieu Ky) in agitation techniques among workers. Since

most Viet students did not understand Chinese, translation was assigned to Ho Tung Mau and Lam Duc Thu.

Thanh also wrote in the report : *"Many Viets in Paris belong to the Coalition of French Colonies. They have two papers, "The Pariah" in French and "The Soul of Vietnam" in native language. Along them is Nguyen The Truyen whom you, comrades in the Committee for Colonial Studies, already know. Could you put me in contact with Nguyen The Truyen through the Committee and ask him to send me those two publications ?"*. Obviously Thanh wouldn't put it that way if he were the founder or editor of those publications. He would never miss boasting of his work and getting the credit before his bosses by saying : "I am the founder or editor of those two papers; please instruct Nguyen The Truyen to send them to me through the Committee". But he didn't say that because it would have been too easy for the comrades to check up on his claim.

### **SELLING THE MASTER FOR MUCH MORE**

In the Viet minds, the name Phan Boi Chau stands for a new spirit of patriotism and resistance to foreign rule. The depth and brilliance of his political thinking, his dedication and sacrifices, his physical and mental endurance and his literary talent earned him the love and admiration of the entire nation and gathered around him a new breed of leaders who made the cause of an independent Vietnam the meaning of their lives.

Leaving Vietnam in 1905 at the age of 38, he spent 20 years in Japan, China and Thailand, observing the political scene, getting into contact with political thinkers, setting up a network for taking young people abroad for training. The large crowd of Viet revolutionaries abroad comprised several groups varying slightly in their tactics. Under his leadership, these groups cooperated with one another and were united in their striving toward a common goal, the independence of Vietnam. It was not surprising, therefore, that the French were trying to track him down. Phan Boi Chau knew that Nguyen Tat Thanh and some others were communists but mistakenly believed that these persons were loyal to Vietnam and took communism as a means, not an end. However unfortunate, his error was humanly unavoidable. Living in East Asia barely one decade after the Bolshevik seizure of control in Russia, he could not possibly be expected to know the treachery, hypocrisy, tactics of deception and blind allegiance of Lenin's disciples.

Then on June 30, 1925 Phan Boi Chau, traveling in Shanghai, unknowingly came into the French concession territory where French police was waiting for him. Brought back to Hanoi he was tried and sentenced to death. The execution was not carried out only because French authorities sensed the popular outrage and feared

subsequent uprisings. Instead, they kept him under permanent house arrest in Hue. Thus ended the revolutionary career of this Viet leader who was disliked by Nguyen Tat Thanh's family and would have been a serious obstacle to Thanh's ambitions. Phan Boi Chau died of natural causes in 1940 at the age of 73. Had he lived 5 more years he would have seen his traitor back in Vietnam under the new name Ho Chi Minh.

It wasn't difficult for Nguyen Tat Thanh with the help of Lam Duc Thu to plot the sellout of Phan Boi Chau to the French. After a secret meeting between the two, the negotiation with the French was carried out by Thu through a Viet friend name Vi (Vi.), former employee of the French consulate in Hongkong. A deal was struck at 100,000 piasters according to one source and 150,000 according to another (for comparison, one buffalo at that time cost 5 piasters). Phan Boi Chau happened to be in Hangzhou. Thanh sent a message asking him to come to Canton for a meeting in which his advice was needed, then made arrangements for him to be led into the French territory when he passed by Shanghai. Thanh and Thu split the money. Thanh spent his in communist activities, while Thu went to live a life of luxury in Hongkong and continued to get rich by extorting money from Viet students of the Phan Boi Chau organization as a price for not being handed over to the French.

But money was not the principal motive of Thanh's sordid deal. He wanted eventually to emerge as the most prominent leader of all revolutionaries abroad. He had found or was finding ways to discredit Nguyen The Truyen, Phan Van Truong and Phan Chu Trinh and that was easy. But Phan Boi Chau's prestige was such that there was no way to discredit him. Hence Phan Boi Chau must somehow be removed and the earlier the better.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

World War II was drawing rapidly to a close. Moscow lost no time in getting the ball rolling with a pet project that it had got started through an apparatus called Komintern (Third International), later renamed Kominform. That was to seize colonies from European countries by setting in motion an anti-imperialist campaign and impelling colonies to national liberation wars under the leadership of native disguised Soviet agents.

The outlook in East Asia was good. In China the communist victory was in the cards. In Vietnam, the French had been disarmed by the Japanese and the Japanese were to get out soon. That was the best moment for Nguyen Tat Thanh to come on the scene. Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chu Trinh were gone. The rest of the leaders he

felt he could push aside with no difficulty. But what name should he take ? The name Nguyen Tat Thanh would make it too easy for the public to trace his family and his background which did not really stand out as revolutionary. The name Nguyen Ai Quoc would mean to the public that he had had a good fight for national interests while in Paris. But it might also raise suspicion about his communist allegiance, which he knew he must avoid at all costs, in the beginning. In fact he had to go through the motion of dissolving an organization which he had set up and which was known to be communist. Also to dispel suspicion he even tried to convince a Catholic bishop that he was a believer (about ready for baptism perhaps). Thus the name Nguyen Ai Quoc would be an asset only later on; for the very beginning he must keep it for himself and assume the name Ho Chi Minh. For most people Ho Chi Minh was just a nice sounding name. That was all right for Thanh. But for some people in the Nghe Tinh (Ho's hometown) region the name vaguely brought back to mind a respectable revolutionary who went abroad to fight for the great cause. That was even better for Thanh, since people were tempted to believe that he was the man. In reality, Ho Chi Minh was the pseudonym of Ho Hoc Lam, a patriot, native of the village Quynh Doi, province Nghe An. After achieving a high academic status, he left for China in pursuit of national liberation, served as military officer in the nationalist army of Chiang Kai-Shek and died circa 1936 ("Personalities of Nghe Tinh Binh by Tam Can, Personalities of Nghe Tinh Binh by Tam Can). There exist undocumented assertions that Nguyen Tat Thanh was at Ho Chi Minh's deathbed when he died in a Chinese hospital.

With all precautions taken about names, background and patriotic image, Thanh could now go ahead to get rid of contending political leaders and their parties in one way or another, and set up a regime with some semblance of democracy. And so, in 1946, there took place the most ridiculous political event in history : representatives of the Viet people unanimously voted to the office of president a man who was a total stranger to some and whom the rest of them mistook for someone else. That was a good illustration of how well Nguyen Tat Thanh learned from his masters the techniques of concealment, deceit and trickery.

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